THE DIAMONDS

BY J. S. FLETCHER.

The Romance of a Hoard of Stolen Jewels and of the Mysterious Fate That Dogged Their Possessors.

CHAPTER I.
The Brass-bound Box.

IT was a brilliant June morning in Plymouth, and the folk who filled the streets, under the cheery influence of the blue sky and the bright sunlight, went along their various ways as though there were no such things as care or anxiety in the world.

To one man, however, who was strolling about the Town Hall Square, with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his trousers, the general brightness of the morning mattered little or nothing. He was a broadly-built, brown-faced individual, roughly dressed in clothes that seemed to have seen much wear and to have been more than once immersed in sea water, and the fact that his pea-jacket was tightly buttoned up about his throat argued that he either wore no shirt, or that his linen was not exactly presentable.

His boots were seamed and split, and he dragged his feet a little as he walked, as though he were slightly footsore. His clean-shaven face and hard, keen eyes scowled at the people that he met, and once or twice, as he stood on the curb in front of the post-office, he spat on the roadway at his feet in apparent contempt or derision.

It needed no second glance at him to tell that he was down on his luck, and hated all the world in consequence.

As the clock of the Town Hall struck 11, the man turned and walked slowly into the post-office. He approached that part of the counter where callers' letters are delivered, and leaning toward the clerk in attendance, asked in a low voice if he had anything for John Lindsay.

There was something in his tone which suggested that he had made the same application more than once before, with disappointing results; his question, indeed, was uttered in a spiritless and half-careless fashion, which seemed to imply that he asked it as a mere matter of form, and expected nothing in answer to it but a blank negative. The clerk, however, immediately turned to the pigeon-hole labeled "L," and produced a dirty envelope, which he turned over gingerly.

"From where?" he asked.

The man's eyes glittered for a second, and he half stretched out his hand for the letter.

"Ought to be from West Hartlepool," he said.

The clerk tossed the letter across the counter, finely indifferent to anything connected with its recipient.

Lindsay's hand trembled a little as he picked it up. He stepped to one side and tore the envelope apart with rough haste. There was a half sheet of paper inside, with a few lines of writing upon it. He scarcely glanced at this; his eyes eagerly devoured the sight of the two folded postal orders lying within.

Lindsay opened them hurriedly; something like relief came into his expression as he realized that two golden sovereigns were about to lie in his palm. He walked over to the counter, seized a pen, filled in the blank spaces, took up the money which the clerk handed him, and walked out again into the sunshine.

At last. "The same after ten years! Well!"

Lindsay turned away suddenly and walked slowly down the street. His face lost the expression of astonishment and assumed that of anxious thought. He sauntered along, the cigar still burning in the corner of his mouth, and his hands once more deep in his pockets, his forehead puckered into lines and creases of serious deliberation.

"How to get hold of it again," he muttered to himself. "That's the job! That cursed pawnbroker will smell a rat if I seem too eager about it, and I've got no money to satisfy him if he springs the price. Hang it, I'll have it, though, whatever means I have to use. It's mine."

He crossed the street presently and walked back in the direction of the shop in which the brass-bound box lay. His eyes, fixed upon the pavement, took no heed of the passers-by, and consequently he did not observe a brown man who came toward him and recognized him with no other sign of surprise than a sudden smile.

He was a small, lithely-built Hindu, clad in faded clothes of light texture, and wearing a dark-colored turban. He glided past Lindsay with the stealthiness of a cat. But as soon as he had passed him, the Hindu turned and looked at the retreating figure up and down with swift comprehending glances. Then he followed slowly, and so the two went along the street until Lindsay came abreast of the general dealer's shop. He paused for a moment before he crossed the roadway.

At first his movements were uncertain and irresolute; then his pace quickened and he went straight to the shop door and entered. The Hindu turned across the street at a different angle and came back toward Mr. Joseph's window at a swift pace. He went quickly by, and his alert eyes searched the window. They fell on the brass-bound box, and an extraordinarily observant onlooker might have seen a transient gleam of astonishment flash into them.

Quick as thought the Hindu crossed the street again and began to saunter up and down on the opposite side. His eyes seemed to see nothing in particular, but they were never off the door through which Lindsay had disappeared.

Mr. Aaron Josephs was reading the newspaper when Lindsay entered the shop.

He took in the man's poor appearance at a glance, and turned to him carelessly. Lindsay's fingers drummed on the counter.

"You've a bit of a box there in the window, mister," he said as calmly as he could. "It's the sort of thing I've been looking for to hold a few little things like that a man wants to keep locked up. Perhaps we can trade if the price isn't too much, and it's a strong lock."

Mr. Aaron Josephs looked into the heterogeneous disorder of his window. He shook his head and glanced back at Lindsay's much-worn pea-jacket.

"It's a beautiful box, that, my friend," he answered. "A curiosity. I'm afraid the price would be more than you'd care to give."

"How do you know?" asked Lindsay. "Here, let's see it."

"Oh, you can see it," answered Mr. Josephs. "No harm in looking at it that I know of."

He took the box out of the window and set it on the counter. Lindsay's eyes assumed a new eagerness; his fingers trembled as he tapped the dark wood. Mr. Josephs noticed his agitation.

"Aye, it's a nice piece of work," Lindsay said, trying to appear unconcerned. "It'll just hold two or three little matters. What might you be wanting for it, mate?"

Mr. Josephs tapped the lid. The box sounded very hollow.

"Oh, well, now, what would you give? You see what beautiful wood it is; scented too, and the brass corners is lovely. You don't see a bit of work like that every day."

"I'll give you ten shillings," said Lindsay.

"Oh, s'help me!" said Mr. Josephs, snatching up the box and putting it on a shelf behind him. "Ten shillings! Oh, I couldn't sell it for five pounds."

"What!" said Lindsay. "Five pounds for a bit of wood and brass like that?"

"Ah, but the work, my friend! See here"—he put the box back on the counter again—"look at the beautiful carving on the top, note the nice smell of the wood, and the solid brass at the corners—why, it's a piece of art, is that box."

"How much?" asked Lindsay. His eagerness was causing him to lose his temper; he spoke snappishly.

Mr. Josephs looked his customer over again.

"Ten pounds," he said shortly.

"Humph!" muttered Lindsay. He leaned over the counter, putting his hard face close to the general dealer's. "Look here, mister," he said, "supposing that box isn't yours to sell at all! What then?"

Mr. Josephs started back, clutching the box in his hands. He looked from it to Lindsay, from Lindsay back to the box. His face paled a little.

"Eh?" he said. "What's that you say? This box not mine—not my property? Here, you get out of my shop. I don't want to have nothing to do with you."

"I daresay," answered Lindsay. It seemed to him that the general dealer was somewhat alarmed.

His bullying manner increased. "Oh, yes, I daresay," he continued. "But perhaps it's a case of having to, mister, I says, what if that box ain't yours? What if you've no right to sell it? What it them as it belongs to should turn up and ask you ugly questions? Eh? What if there should be summat said about receiving stolen property? Eh? What if"——

"Here!" interrupted Mr. Josephs. "None of that! You get out of my shop, quick."

Lindsay's face grew ugly and determined. He kept his eyes fixed firmly on the pawnbroker's.

"All right," he said suddenly. "I'm off, and I shall be back in two minutes with a policeman, mister."

He turned and walked quickly out of the door. The Hindu, watching for his coming from the other side of the street, saw him look up and down as if in search of something. A policeman stood at the corner of a side street. Lindsay went up and spoke to him.

The Hindu saw the policeman stare hard at his interrogator and shake his head. He seemed somewhat puzzled, and it was with evident unwillingness that he finally walked back with Lindsay to the pawn-shop. The two men went inside and the Hindu waited calmly for their reappearance.

Mr. Josephs was still behind the counter, handling the box, when the policeman and Lindsay entered. He looked up, and it seemed to the policeman that there was something of fear in his face.

"Now, then," said Lindsay, turning to the policeman and pointing to the box, "this is how things are. I happen to be walking along this street and I see this box in this man's window. I recognize it as my property—lost some years ago—and naturally I want it back. I offer this man a price for it and he asks ten pounds. Ten pounds! Now I won't give him anything—'cause why? It's mine—and I'll have it. Ain't that the law?"

The policeman looked from Mr. Josephs to Lindsay. The former seemed stupefied by Lindsay's last words.

"Of course, if it's yours, it's yours," said the policeman, "but I guess you'd have to prove it."

"Of course," echoed Josephs. "Why, anybody might come into the shop and say that things were theirs. Let him prove that it's his."

"I'll soon do that," said Lindsay with startling readiness. "Now, mister, you'll acknowledge that since I came into this shop I haven't handled that box, except just to tap it on the top. Isn't that so?"

The general dealer nodded.

"Very well," continued Lindsay. "Turn up that box and you'll find a little brass plate underneath it, with the letters J. L. and a date 1889 on it. Come, now."

The pawnbroker turned the box over unwillingly.

"Now, then," said Lindsay, with malicious triumph, "what did I tell you? and if you want to know what J. L. means, look here."

Lindsay pulled out the letter which he received at the post-office. "Look at that. Plain enough, ain't it? John Lindsay—that's me. That's a letter I had this morning from my brother at West Hartlepool. J. L.: John Lindsay, 1889—the year I became possessed of that box. What do you say, officer?"

"It looks as if it was his box," said the policeman, looking at Mr. Josephs.

"Of course it's my box," said Lindsay angrily. "I lost it five years ago when I was on the Brahmapootra, and I expect the thief sold it to this ere chap."

"It's not eighteen months since I bought it," cried the general dealer. "And if it was his box, how was I to know? Am I expected to ask the history of every article I buy?"

"You'll have an unpleasant history if you don't hand that article over," said Lindsay grimly. "Come on. Let's have it."

The general dealer paused. What was it that made the man so eager to possess the brass-bound box? Could it be that it possessed some value which he himself had not credited it with? He grasped it more firmly in his hands and resolved not to be browbeaten.

"No," he said, "I shan't! If it's yours you must prove it in the right way. How do I know anything about you?"

The policeman looked at Lindsay's frowning face and foresaw the beginning of a scene.

"Here," he said, "you'd better do it in a legal fashion. Go to a lawyer, if you're so particular about it."

"What!" exclaimed Lindsay. "To a land-shark like that just to get my own? Here, mister, you'd better hand it over, or I'll——"

"None o' that," said the policeman. The matter was sliding over his domain, and he felt somewhat relieved. "Can't have any threatening, my man. If Mr. Josephs has some property of yours, there's a proper way to get it. You can't take the law into your hands in this country. You can't get your box by coercion."

"No, of course not," said Mr. Josephs, looking at the officer with gratitude. "Let him prove his case. I want to do nothing but what's right."

Lindsay looked firmly from one to the other.

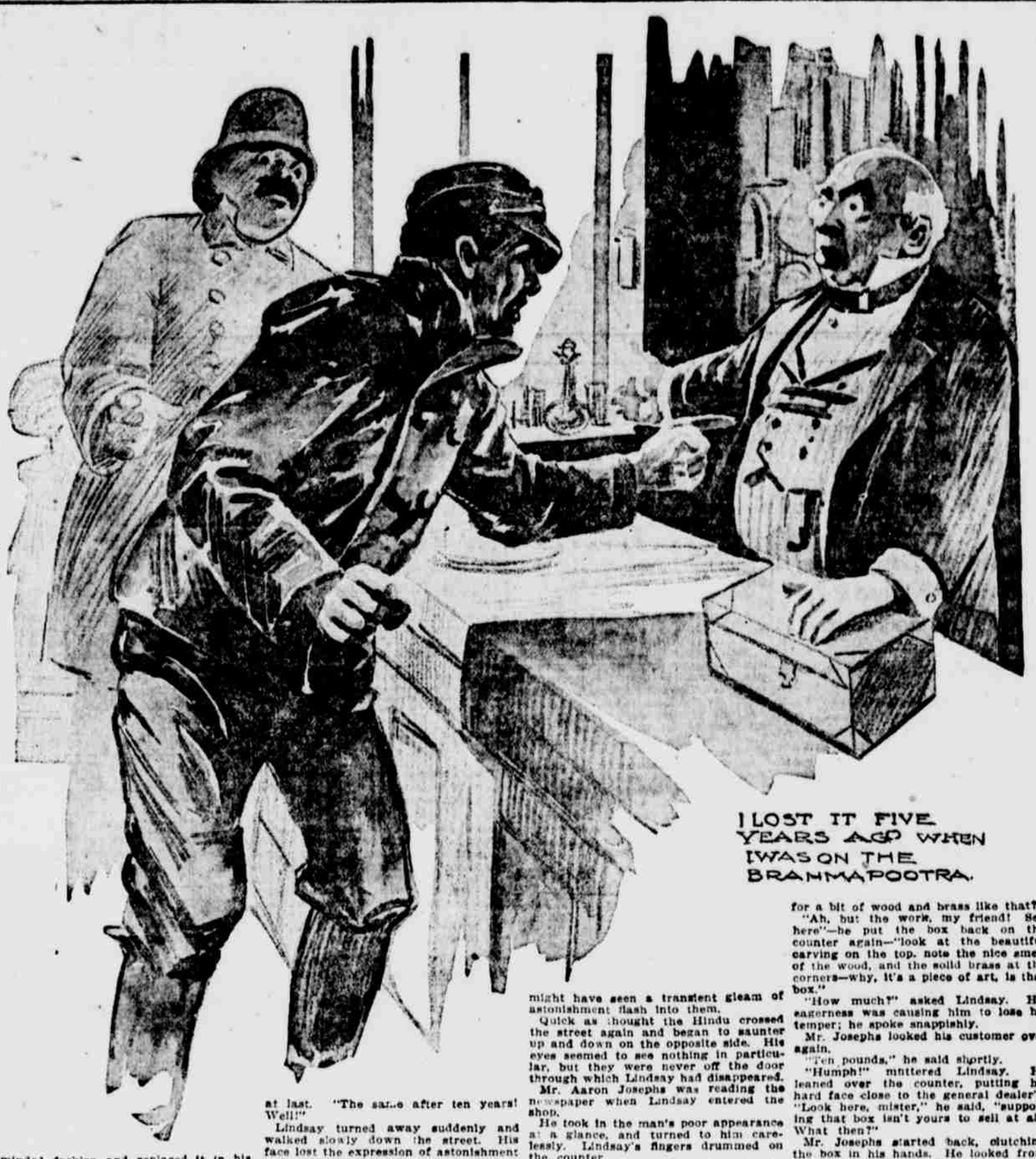
"Oh," he said. "It's that way, is it? If a man finds another man in possession of property that don't belong to him, and that does belong to the other, there's got to be law took about it, has there? Very well. You look out, Mr. Josephs, or whatever your name is. That there box is mine, and I'll have it. I'd ha' given a sovereign to get it quietly, but since you won't, you won't, and dearly you'll pay for it." He turned and walked out, leaving the general dealer and the policeman staring at each other.

"Shouldn't wonder if it is his," said the policeman.

"Maybe," answered Mr. Josephs, "but he will have to prove it first. It came to me in the ordinary way of business."

Lindsay walked straight across the street and turned in the direction of Plymouth. Before he had gone a hundred yards, he heard a faint cough close to his ear, and felt a hand placed lightly on his shoulder. He turned swiftly and found himself face to face with the Hindu.

(To Be Continued)



"Watching the Other Side of the Street."

IT is a rare gift to be able to choose and be satisfied.

Some are perfectly content when they have made their decision; others are tormented by the thought that perhaps after all they have missed the best and selected the worst.

The judge in the Maud Muller affair was entirely self-deceived, in all probability, when he thought that had he married the other woman he might have been happier. He was doubtless one of those self-crucifying wretches that, whatever they do, always wish they had done something else.

Mark Twain somewhere describes how the new knife looked quite contemptible to the boy while it was on the store counter with all the other knives, but was radiantly beautiful when he got it home. That may be true of some natures, but others are quite oppositely disposed, says Frank Crane in the Chicago News. The minute a thing is theirs they despise it.

Some girls cannot select a husband. It is not so much that they fear that any one of them would not do well enough; they fear a better one may get away.

There are some old maids who are so simply because they have never dared settle on one man lest the man they should have chosen might afterward come along.

This diseased condition of the deciding power is widespread. Most people wish they hadn't—whatever it was.

If you settle in Kalamazoo you wish you had gone to Oshkosh instead.

If you send your boy to Harvard you wish you had sent him to Yale.

I know a woman who was born in Hillsboro, Ill., and the one regret of her life is that she was not born in Italy.

Whatever is is bad—to you; and whatever did not happen would have been fine.

Life is a series of wrong selections.
Quit it!
Don't be a poor scraggly Wishihadn't,
Nor a sickly little Wishiweren't.
Nor a distressed Wishididn't.

You may remember Huxley's remarks: "Life is like walking along a crowded street; there always seem to be fewer obstacles to getting along on the opposite pavement; and yet if one crosses over matters are rarely mended."

The New Plays

The Perplexed Drew Listens to Sutro.

BY CHARLES DARNTON.

THAT good actor, John Drew, established himself as an equally good audience at the Empire Theatre last night by lending his trained ear as well as his finished art to Alfred Sutro's four-act conversazione, "The Perplexed Husband."

For the greater part of two acts it was a delight to watch the perplexed Mr. Drew as he listened to the loquacious Mr. Sutro. In the role of the puzzled husband of Sophie Pelling, who had embraced woman suffrage with both arms during his absence from home, he blinked and winked with great success. Sophie had taken into her home a talkative sponge called "The Master," together with a suffragist whose face and manner at once changed her into a suffragette. To make matters more bewildering to her husband Sophie had taken an Ibseneque turn around the corner of "A Doll's House" and come away from the play imagining herself another Nora. Not content with being a household doll, she saw herself both as principal lady of the harem and a parasite.

All this was very amusing. Meanwhile Mr. Drew could do nothing but open his eyes. The perplexed husband dealt in tea and knew nothing of Ibsen. He could only reflect that if all he was told about Nora were true, "A Doll's House" was a bad play and couldn't have a long run. As for woman suffrage, that was another cup of tea that didn't appeal to his uncultivated taste. Like a sensible man, however, he took up the cause of woman by bringing from his office a girl whose body lived in Bloomsbury, but whose soul dwelt in Athens. She loved beauty and she knew it was his beautiful desire to win back his beautiful wife that had led him to give her a better job than the one she had just lost by mixing poetry with common everyday business prose.

Up to this point the play proved decidedly entertaining. Although an element of the fantastic was introduced with the appearance of the self-styled Kalleia in the Pelling home, the situation had a certain Gilbertian quality that made it interesting. But in attempting to mix Gilbert with Shaw, the enterprising Mr. Sutro made a rather bad mess of it. The fact is that the fun of his play stopped short in the second act, after which there was nothing but talk of the most wearisome sort.

The verbose author not only fails in his possible attempt to talk like Shaw, but he does the obvious thing by using the Bloomsbury maiden with the Greek soul as a means to make the wife jealous and so effect a cure of her Ibsen-suffrage complications. With little respect for the dead, Mr. Sutro doesn't hesitate to make a joke of Ibsen, though he is careful to give both sides of the living suffrage question. His serious speeches in favor of the cause were taken so seriously by Miss Margaret Watson as to mar an otherwise perfect performance. As the chaste devotee of beauty Miss Mary Boland looked freakishly attractive and acted with more humor than simplicity. Miss Nina Sevening played the young wife understandingly, but Miss Alice John seemed to think that her duty as a practical sister-in-law was to pound out every word with sledgehammer emphasis. Hubert Druce was capital as "The Master," in spite of the fact that he served as a horrible example of Mr. Sutro's tedious glibness.

"S'Matter, Pop?"

By C. M. Payne